

IN THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application. Applicants note that the originally file claims included two claims numbered 23. Applicants have cancelled both occurrences of claim 23 to avoid and future confusion.

Please cancel claims 1 through 17, 23, and 25 through 27 without prejudice or disclaimer.

Please amend claims 18, 21, 22 and 24 as set forth below.

Listing of Claims:

1-17 (Cancelled)

18. (Currently Amended) A ladder hinge and rail assembly comprising:
a first ladder rail;
a second ladder rail;
a first hinge component having a laterally extending ~~hinge tongue~~hinge tongue, and a longitudinally extending rail mount section, ~~and an abutment shoulder, the longitudinally extending rail mount section of the first hinge component exhibiting a varying cross-sectional geometry taken transverse to a longitudinal axis thereof~~, wherein the longitudinally extending rail mount section of the first hinge component is partially longitudinally disposed within the first ladder rail ~~in a substantially conformal and cooperatively mating relationship~~;
a second hinge component having a lateral ~~hinge groove~~hinge groove and a longitudinally extending rail mount section, ~~the longitudinally extending rail mount section of the second hinge component exhibiting a varying cross-sectional geometry taken transverse to a longitudinal axis thereof~~, wherein the longitudinally extending rail mount section of the second hinge component is partially longitudinally disposed within the second ladder rail ~~in a substantially conformal and cooperatively mating relationship~~, and wherein the ~~hinge tongue~~hinge tongue of the first hinge component is disposed within the ~~hinge groove~~hinge groove of the second hinge component and configured to provide relative rotation of the first and second hinge components about a defined axis from a first relative

position of the first hinge component and the second hinge component to a second relative position of the first hinge component and the second hinge component, wherein the second relative position includes the first hinge component extending substantially longitudinally from the second hinge component and wherein the shoulder abutment abuts a surface of the second hinge component in a substantially conformal manner.

19. (Original) The ladder hinge and rail assembly of claim 18, wherein an internal cross-sectional periphery of the first rail is configured to interlock with and transmit an applied loading to the rail mount section of the first hinge component.

20. (Original) The ladder hinge and rail assembly of claim 19, wherein an internal cross-sectional periphery of the second rail is configured to interlock with and transmit an applied loading to the rail mount section of the second hinge component.

21. (Currently Amended) The ladder hinge and rail assembly of claim 18, wherein the rail mount section of the first hinge component includes ~~an first~~ a first reinforcement segment, a second reinforcement segment and a web ~~section-segment~~ segment extending therebetween, wherein the first and second reinforcement segments each exhibit a greater cross-sectional thickness than a cross-sectional thickness of the web segment.

22. (Currently Amended) The ladder hinge and rail assembly of claim 18, wherein the first hinge component is ~~a configured~~ configured as a unitary member.

23. (Cancelled)

24. (Currently Amended) The ladder hinge and rail assembly of ~~claim 23~~ claim 23, wherein the second hinge component comprises an extruded member.

25-27 (Cancelled)

Please enter new claims 28 through 34 as follows:

28. (New) The ladder hinge and rail assembly of claim 22, wherein the second hinge component is configured as a unitary member.

29 (New) The ladder hinge and rail assembly of claim 18, wherein the first hinge component comprises an extruded member.

30. (New) The ladder hinge and rail assembly of claim 18, wherein the longitudinally extending rail mount section of the first hinge component exhibits a varying cross-sectional geometry taken transverse to a longitudinal axis thereof, and wherein longitudinally extending rail mount section of the first hinge component is partially longitudinally disposed within the first ladder rail in a substantially conformal and cooperatively mating relationship.

31. (New) The ladder hinge and rail assembly of claim 30, wherein the longitudinally extending rail mount section of the second hinge component exhibits a varying cross-sectional geometry taken transverse to a longitudinal axis thereof, and wherein longitudinally extending rail mount section of the second hinge component is partially longitudinally disposed within the first ladder rail in a substantially conformal and cooperatively mating relationship.

32. (New) The ladder hinge and rail assembly of claim 18, wherein the abutment should includes a substantially arcuate surface.

33. (New) The ladder hinge and rail assembly of claim 32, wherein the abutment shoulder abuts the surface of the second hinge component along substantially the entire length of the arcuate surface.

34. (New) The ladder hinge and rail assembly of claim 18, wherein the first hinge component and the second hinge component cooperatively define a beam when if the second relative position.